

2022/23 Forest Health Council Legislative Committee Concepts

Note: *These 5 legislative concepts are ordered from most to least votes based on votes by Forest Health Council members.*

1. Invest in expanding forestry education in Colorado

Invest in Forestry Programs at Community Colleges to increase the forestry workforce. Front Range Community College offers a Forestry Technology degree, accredited by the Society of American Foresters, and is the only two year forestry program in the state. This program consistently produces students in high demand for public and private employment. However, the program is running at capacity and classes are frequently full, preventing students from completing their degree on time. The program requires at least 2 additional faculty and a technical instructor to increase the number of students served, which could be assisted by increased funding through the Department of Higher Education.

2. Invest in workforce development programs (CYCA, Corrections Crews)

The Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) and Department of Corrections' State Wildland Inmate Fire Teams (SWIFT), and related corps programs, provide opportunities for youth and incarcerated men to gain experience in forestry work, wildfire mitigation and fire response in a supported environment. Ongoing investments in these programs could expand the forestry and wildfire mitigation workforce in Colorado by increasing the number of participants exiting the programs with skills needed to enter the industry. DNR's Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP) supports both CYCA and SWIFT crews in wildfire mitigation while CSFS' Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grants favor proposals which engage CYCA.

Relevant programs for further investment to support hand crew-focused workforce development:

- Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP) Workforce Development grant (currently has \$4M one-time funding)
 - Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program, which currently receives \$8M per year of general fund
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3. Consistent investments in Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)

The Good Neighbor program allows the USFS and BLM to enter into cooperative agreements with states to perform forest, rangeland and watershed restoration projects on federal lands. Under the agreement, the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) has the authority to conduct forest treatments on National Forests and BLM lands in Colorado, complementing work on state and private lands. Specific benefits of the Good Neighbor Authority include greater efficiencies and less need for creating and maintaining roads to address project work. Eligible projects include those that protect water supplies, manage bark beetles, reduce wildfire risk and meet other forest management objectives. Legislative recommendations could include increasing the amount and/or consistency of funding for GNA work.

Relevant programs for further investment:

- C.R.S. 23-31-313. Healthy forests - vibrant communities
 - Currently funded at \$2 million annually through general fund (though only a portion of these funds go to GNA projects).
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4. Invest in local/state/federal agency planning and project management capacity

As more money becomes available for implementing forest management, there are concerns about bottlenecks in the pipeline of “shovel ready” projects due to inadequate local, state and federal staff to plan and manage projects. The state legislature could make additional resources available to help local governments and state agencies hire additional capacity for this work.

Relevant programs for investment that can support project planning and project management capacity:

- C.R.S. 23-31-313. Healthy forests - vibrant communities: Investments can support increased planning and project management capacity at the CSFS
 - Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP) Landscape Resilience Investment grant
 - Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant: Up to 25% of of grant funds can be used for planning and project management capacity
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5. Create incentives for private industry (logging and grazing)

Forest Health Council members expressed interest in creating incentives for private industry in logging and grazing. Colorado has some existing incentives for private industry, including the Forest Business Loan Fund (FBLF), a revolving loan program, and historically had a state sales tax exemption for beetle-killed wood. Two additional efforts failed last session (HB22-1166), including a tax credit for equipment purchases (up to \$10,000), and a 50% state cost-share internship program. The Legislative Committee is interested in recommending the following:

- NEW: State cost-share wood products industry internship program
 - Additional investments in the Forest Business Loan Fund (FBLF) through C.R.S 23-31-313 Healthy forests - vibrant communities.
 - Creating more public-private partnerships to reduce barriers to grazing for fuels reduction
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